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ABSTRACT

This report on the problems facing editors of professional information and library science journals in developing and developed countries suggests broad solutions that might help to transfer and make available the surplus of products in one geographic area to another in which such products are in short supply. Areas addressed include (1) historical background, (2) professional organizations, (3) the paucity of authors, (4) professional responsibilities, (5) editors' requirements, (6) unwanted articles, (7) the industrial world's problems, and (8) the need for a centralized clearinghouse. (FM)

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A clearing house for library literature - past experience and future possibilities

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A CLEARING HOUSE FOR LIBRARY LITERATURE - PAST EXPERIENCE AND FUTURE POSIBILITIES

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Introduction :

This paper is not going to make recommendations leading towards clear and positive or final solutions to the problems that face editors of professional library and information science (l.i.s) journals in the so-called 'developing countries' of the world. Instead it will attempt to concentrate upon the problems that face not only them, but also the editors of library and information science and documentation professional journals in the so-called 'developed world', and also indicate some of the problems that these editors face in maintaining contact with their opposite numbers in the other sector of the globe. This paper, therefore, is what might be called a state-of-the-art report on the problems facing those of our colleagues who are editors of professional journals in the developing countries and who face an under-production of articles necessary to keep their journals appearing full and regularly and those problems of our colleagues in the industrialised world who face an abundance of articles for which often they are unable to find adequate space. The paper will then try to suggest in broad terms one or two solutions that might help to transfer and make available the surplus of products in one area of the globe to that part of it in which they are in short supply. (A not unfamiliar problem in other sectors of the economy of the developing countries). I hope that further solutions will materialise, and indicate a positive way forward, in the discussions which are to follow this paper.

Background :

Firstly let us examine the background to this problem faced in the developing countries so that those of our colleagues who have not been brought into contact with it may fully comprehend it and also to set the scene against which these further considerations can take place. I want to speak very briefly about the environment in which in a developing country our colleagues responsible for the editing and publication of professional l.i.s. journals work.

But first a word about the use of the term 'developed countries' and 'developing countries'. I dislike all of them but "developing country" is accepted by these countries and by the United Nations as an acceptable nomenclature, but 'developed countries' I abhor. Many, though called so, are not: what they usually have achieved is industrialization. I shall, therefore, for the sake of brevity refer to "developing countries" and "industrialised countries" although even this terminology is imprecise and not always a correct description.

In the industrialised world there is a tendency to classify all countries that are not so-called industrialized in the crudest terms as developing countries. Yet, an examination of these countries and their economic performances in particular areas of the economy or in certain urban or rural areas indicates that there are many types and that their classification depends on the geographical area or the sector of the economy or the particular activities under consideration. For instance, Bhutan is a developing country, but then, applying United Nations categorization so is Brazil, although some of the cities in Brazil far exceed in their provision of services some of those in the industrialised world. As this classification is so imprecise it would be of greatest use to us as librarians and information workers if we base our categorisation on the level of development of the library and information services as this is the area with which we are exclusively concerned. Not all those in Europe, it should be stated in parentheses but so that the picture is absolutely clear, so qualify.

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One further proviso : this paper, reflecting, I hope, the interests of this Round Table, restricts its considerations to those journals and their problems, that are produced by professional bodies. It is not concerned with those produced by what might be loosely defined as, 'commercial organisations' or published with the motivation of earning a profit for an organisation that is solely profit-motivated rather than professional. My reason for this limitation is that with few exceptions, such as 'Herald of Library Science' published in India, there are few commercially-based ventures in the developing countries. If the limitation appears to restrict the areas from which solutions might arise then the subsequent discussions might reveal them.

Professional organisations :

A problem facing any journal published by a professional association is a developing country, and it is not limited to these countries, is that usually they lack any permanent and full-time supportive organisational infrastructure. The library associations themselves rarely have a permanent secretary or secretariat as those in the UK and the US are lucky enough to possess, and as a consequence the editors work from their homes or offices and experience problems in co-operating with and contacting the professional association's other officers with whom they need contact to successfully publish the journal - such people as the Secretary or Treasurer. The problem is exacerbated in large countries where colleagues are thinly spread over large distances and with communications encumbered by poor telephone, telex and even postal services.

Paucity of authors :

A more important problem is that often there are too few professionals who are adequately qualified both in their knowledge and from their experiences to be able to write authoratitively and therefore to the standard that the editor and his editorial board have set for the journal. Those that are able to produce work of a standard acceptable to an editor are usually not only administering their own library services, but often advising their government and having to represent their

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countries in the international forums. As a consequence, they are pressurised into undertaking too many responsibilities with the result that they often are unable to deliver the articles requested of them, either on time or sometimes at all. Yet, ironically they are often the very people who have the most to contribute to the profession in their countries through professional literature.

Professional responsibilities :

The editor in a developing country of a l.i.s. journal, publishing it on behalf of his professional association, has as a consequence great responsibilities placed upon him. Until a national library association has established a reputation with the national government, with other professional organisations and with authorities employing its members and more significantly, with its own, or its potential membership through other activities, it often has little to offer its members except a journal regularly published to keep them informed about professional developments both inside and outside that country. That is precisely what the professional association cannot produce, because it lacks articles of repute to fill the issues. Without them, the association cannot recruit new members to help to build it up and as a result the profession generally will be poorly judged by those not involved with it. It is a Catch 22 situation, the resolution of which lies mainly in the hands of the editor. (I must add here a personal viewpoint. I believe this situation to be only temporary and to illustrate the pre-natal problems of professional development. I believe that the professional associations will reach a point of development when they will take off, to use an economist's analogy, just as they have in industrialised world, into a developed situation in which there will be a plethora of professional activities and as a consequence, many people will have much to write about. Then the problem will be concerned with too much literature to publish, or a professional literature explosion, when no-one will have the time to read it all!)

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Editors' requirements :

Given the background here outlined and the environment in which our colleague editors have to operate what precisely do they want? Put in the very crudest and most direct manner - they want articles and materials of quality on time to fill the pages of their issues so that they can appear on schedule and adequately filled with articles conforming to a suitable and acceptable standard. Here, at the risk of leaving oneself open to criticism, one must question whether the standards that the editors set themselves are the correct ones. Should an editor look to the best professional publishing in the world against which to measure his standards or instead should he set them against the levels of development of the services in his own country? I firmly believe that he should relate to the highest possible standards. Unless the literature introduces these standards into a country's considerations, for eventual absorption into practice, there are few - and limited - other means by which they will be introduced and then those responsibilities for information flow will fail to fulfil one of their primary functions.

This consideration leads to a second requisite for articles. They are needed not only from practitioners from within their own country but also from those outside in order to sow the seeds of new l.i.s. ideas harvested from the fruits of experience outside their own borders which need to be permitted to generate and grow in the particular cultural, industrial, social, educational and developmental environment in which that country's own library and information services operate. What I am advocating is not cultural imperialism but the opportunities for overseas ideas to be made available to be selected and applied at random according to a country's particular needs. In this audience we should remind ourselves that not all our colleagues are lucky enough to be able to travel to IFLA and to Unesco to obtain their injection of new ideas. Those who cannot need the literature to perform that function. These requisites at first sight appear easy to meet, but a moments thought will indicate some of the problems. Articles written for a readership, or about developments, in one environment are usually not suitable for immediate and unaltered transfer to another. The developing countries are aware of cultural imperialism and rightly do not want to transport it into our own profession. (There was

for instance, until recently, a danger of this in Africa where British and United States library practices were adopted wholesale and unquestioningly when the public library services were being established two decades ago. An awakening to these dangers has occurred and new services are being developed only after careful consideration of, and attention to, the environments in which they are to operate.) In order that professional colleagues in the developing countries can be best informed of developments in the so-called industrialised nations' services they require articles describing them and, ideally, relating them to that particular country's environment and level of l.i.s. development. To meet such a requirement suggests the commissioning of tailor-made articles. Is this possible?

In most cases, I would suggest not, because there are only a limited number of people with experience in both worlds in a position to write them. The only alternative, therefore, is to take articles written for the readership in the industrialised world and place them in the developing world's professional publications. But this produces another problem. The more developed a library and information system becomes the more finite, introverted and narrow become the issues selected for consideration by authors. (Our profession seems to produce a majority of people who dislike examining the overall scene and who instead prefer to concentrate their attention on the minutiae). This produces articles that have a narrow coverage and in-depth approach to specific techniques or developments and that are likely to be of even more limited value to a developing country's readership. Their journals are still likely to be concerned to encourage practitioners to establish the basic infra-structures of library and information services as defined by the NATIS objectives.

Not wanted :

It is not difficult to define what our colleagues in the developing countries do not want. They do not want articles about how "we do it good" in the UK, US, the USSR or Europe. More important, they do not want articles that are inferior or sub-standard and are obvious rejects because of this, from second, third or even fourth submissions to other journals. In other spheres of activity they

are already only too conversant with the consequences of the dumping of inferior quality products and unwanted goods on other areas of their economy. As librarians and information workers we would not wish our profession to be associated with such practices.

Industrial world's problems :

If those are some of the problems (and I am sure there will be many more that will materialise in the discussion) that face our editor colleagues of professional journals in the developing world, what are the problems facing editors in the industrialised world? Here the opposite of the situation in the developing countries is apparent. Editors in the industrialised world face not a shortage but a proliferation of articles. Their problem is not to discover something to publish but to select and to discard and decide what not to publish. (To speak so glibly of 'over-production' in the industrialized world is, of course, an over-simplification that ignores the fact that there is no over-production of articles of quality, and that a number of the small-circulation and very specialized journals dealing, with for instance, research, erudite cataloguing, classification, indexing or thesauri problems are themselves often in the market-place seeking articles to fill their pages. I hope that my audience will appreciate the need to over-generalise and my hope that it does not distort the picture I am painting or reduce the strengths of the arguments that I am making). A further problem is related to the relatively large numbers of journals in these countries. This produces a situation in which there are large numbers of articles moving around between editors in the publications system, either being considered for publication or rejection by a number of editors, rather like oil money in the world's economy. Good or bad they all have to be read to consider them. Contact and communication between authors and editors and editors with editors becomes, therefore, quite complex.

One of the benefits that could assist the developing countries is that the larger markets of the industrialised world encourages writers and that the larger professions produce an adequate number of them to provide articles, not so much to the required amount but surplus to requirements, with the result that

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material is discarded and rejected. It is this material that could provide the solution to the developing countries' editors. It is necessary here again to highlight the fact that the developing countries do not want to be a dumping ground for inferior quality materials. The situation then in those two areas of the globe suggests that this mis-match of over-production in one area may be available to help to solve the problem of temporary under-production in the other if the correct sort of exchange machinery can be established.

A further problem related to the machinery and organisation necessary to off-set over-production with under-production relates to the ways in which most professional l.i.s. journals are published. With few exceptions they are edited by unpaid editors functioning in an honorary capacity and whose main functions are to serve the libraries or library schools in which they are employed. Editing is therefore a part-time commitment indicating professional commitment and involvement of the highest order. Time, energy and resources are therefore at a premium leaving little, if any, spare capacity to undertake additional work. Such a situation leads us to consider the machinery that will be necessary to establish some form of machinery to set right the mis-match of over and under-production.

Before examining the machinery and any organisation that might need to be established to resolve this mis-match let us briefly consider a Candide solution - a solution that would be the best in the best of all possible worlds. The ideal solution to under-production is to commission special articles tailored to meet the specific needs of the developing country and its journal's requirements. It is, however, a solution that pre-supposes that funds are available to pay for the commissioning of such articles. I do not believe them at the moment to exist although I would like to see further thought being given by developmental agencies, either internationally or bilaterally, to an examination of such possibilities. Consideration might also be given to encouraging money into this area in the same way that the Martinus Nijhoff Foundation have assisted with travel grants to commemorate its centenary.

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The machinery :

The first requirement in establishing any machinery to resolve the problem presented by this mis-match - as opposed to any organisation which we shall examine later - will be to learn precisely what the developing country journal editors require. In order to store and have easy access to this information suggests a need to standardise the manner in which this information is collected and stored and suggests a need for detailed profiles from editors of their requirements. Some consideration would need to be given to the manner in which it is filed because the more detailed it is, and that is what is ideally required, the more difficult is it to file and gain ready access. A second difficulty relates to the method by which the data would be up-dated.

An alternative machinery might be to collect copies of rejected articles and to index and to abstract their contents and despatch the information to all journal editors in the developing world. A further alternative might be to establish an "information bank" of articles deposited there by authors. Earlier experiences suggest that this results in a collection of "bottom drawer" articles that are considered by their authors to be either not yet ready for publication or not to be of a standard that they themselves would be content to have appear in the world's leading l.i.s. journals. The motivation for the authors to deposit would therefore seem to be strong and for the developing country editors to reject them even stronger still.

The organisation : a Clearing House

To summarise; there appears to be two primary alternatives - that from the point of view of the developing countries would be to list their requirements; that from the industrialised countries would be to produce a listing of articles surplus to requirements. However the two alternatives do not appear to be mutually exclusive and the two approaches should be capable of being brought together by some form of organisation having the required machinery. One solution might be an organisation having the sort of machinery whereby editors in the industrialised world would inform a Clearing House of the articles that they had rejected. This information and

an abstract of the contents of the article would then be matched against the stored profiles provided by the developing countries to relate those most closely matching availability with requirements. The Cleaning House (C.H.) would then need to act as a switching centre putting author and editor into communication. It is not envisaged that the C.H. would become involved in the minutiae of contracting or negotiating between the two parties. Once the switch had been established the CH would opt out only receiving copies of the correspondence in order to be kept informed.

Now let us turn our attention to the physical machinery required to establish the Clearing House. The storage of information from off the profiles, particularly if they are as detailed as ideally they should be to marry together the materials available with the space in the relevant journals, will require either an efficient card index or even some form of computerised data-base. Either of which will require staff to transpose information from the profile provided. Any movement of material from the journal to which it was submitted to any other will encourage correspondence. Correspondence requires staff to write and present it.

The machinery consequent upon a rejection might be relatively simple. The editor in an industrialized country rejecting an author might, by a copy of the rejection letter, inform the Clearing House which would be the signal for it to follow up directly with the author. The CH would then need to enquire whether the author was agreeable to his article being made available through the CH to developing countries' editors. If the author was agreeable then the Clearing House would "marry" the article with a profile requirement. The editor to which the profile corresponded would then be contacted and from then on contact would be directly between the author and the editor with copies to the Clearing House for information. If the "placement" broke down then it would be for the author or the editor to notify the CH in order that further negotiations could continue.

This is, of course, nothing more than a rough outline and large number of difficulties will need to be resolved. Some that come to mind relate to the attitude of the rejected author to his

article appearing in what he might consider to be an out-of-the-main-stream developing country journal. Consideration would need to be given as to whether and to when an author would be able to voice an opinion.

A further difficulty is related to the issue of the language of the article. It is too easy to fall into the error of believing that the majority of the publications in the developing world use English as a second or foreign language. This is far from being correct and it would not be right for the CH only to concern itself with materials in this language. However translation of articles from another language into English or out of English into another secondary language such as Arabic, Chinese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, presents further, although not insuperable, problems.

Whatever machinery might be established would need to be simple but however simple the machinery proposed the costs of staff and mail will need to be overcome. It would appear to be impractical to charge for such a service when most developing country journals are already operated on a shoe-string.

The location of a Clearing House, the machinery for which need be little more than the files and index would need to be located within some organisation. Those that come to mind are the IFLA Headquarters that are already much over-burdened with work consequent upon the adoption of the new Statutes and a much expanded (and welcome) professional programme. The General Information Programmes Division of Unesco might be another international alternative and one that has already been proposed at the 1978 Second Symposium of Editors of Library Journals. At a national level the two Associations with full-time, paid and permanent staff spring to mind (the American Library Association and the Library Association in London) although other national alternatives could be within a national library or within a large library system or withing a library school anywhere in either the industrialised world or the developing countries. An obvious criterion on which to select a home would be the resources that could be allocated to the operation of the Clearing House (CH).

Finale :

I am aware that this paper probably results in the identification of more problems than it solves. There are many loose ends that require tying together and I hope that the discussion that follows will do this. The purpose of the paper was simply - firstly, to outline the problem for those not familiar with the developing countries' editorial problems; secondly, to identify some of the problems outside the developing countries; thirdly, to suggest the sort of machinery that might help to bridge the gap between under-production and over-production, and fourthly, to identify the type of organisation required in which the machinery could be established to solve the mis-match problem.

Finally, where lies the way ahead? I would hope that this has not been simply an intellectual exercise. The problems facing our colleagues remain and therefore demand a solution. Does this paper point the way ahead? If it does then I hope that its contents and the Round Table's discussions and views could be given careful consideration by a small group of involved people, perhaps a Working Party, with a view to drafting a fully-developed proposal that could obtain IFLA's seal of approval, after consultation within the membership and the world of l.i.s. publishing, and then be presented to various funding bodies with the hope of receiving the necessary finance to start a Clearing House for Library Literature.

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